Certification Maintenance Considerations

Designing	Conferring
Developing	Accrediting
Implementing	Maintaining

Functional Manager	PMO
Component	Candidate

PREFACE: *The management and administration of a certification program's policies and procedures, on behalf of a Functional Manager and the certification program's governing body (hereafter, program stakeholders), is a critical PMO (Program Management Office) role and responsibility. However, to be successful, it behooves the PMO to ensure that program stakeholders fully understand that the policies and procedures governing a certification program must be implementable. This means that, at times, the PMO will need be proactive in the design and development of the program's policies and procedures. Experience suggests that this is particularly true with respect to the topic of "certification maintenance policies and procedures."*

PURPOSE: *The purpose of this job aid is to present "critical considerations" that the PMO needs to address with program stakeholders with respect to "certification maintenance."*

PROCEDURE: *"Certification Maintenance" is a topic that should be discussed as part of program stakeholders' deliberations about the program's certification scheme. For the most part, the deliberations should provide guidance or answers to three sets of questions.*

1. Should certification maintenance activities provide evidence of "maintaining competence" (i.e., with respect to the topic areas covered by a certification) and/or "growth"?

   1.A.   If "maintaining competence," is recertification an acceptable option?

   1.B.   What categories of maintenance activities will the program accept (Education, Experience, Exposure, Training, etc.)?

2. How will the program handle maintenance requirements if the program offers multiple certifications (and an individual may end up holding more than one certification)?

   2.A.   If "maintaining competence," does the individual need to recertify on both certifications?

   2.B.   If "growth," does the individual need to enact separate and distinct activities to maintain each certification?

3. What time interval is ideal for the maintenance cycle?

   3.A.   When does the maintenance clock start?

   3.B.   How will the program handle the maintenance clock for individuals with multiple certifications?

Answers to the three sets of questions outlined above serve as a starting point for the development of certification maintenance policies and procedures. Ideally, the PMO would take the answers to these questions to generate certification maintenance policy and procedure options that, in turn, are discussed and vetted by the governing body's Policy and Procedures Working Group (PP/WG). The PP/WG then recommends its preferred option(s) to the governing body for discussion and approval. Finally, the PMO then generates and implements the standard operating procedure(s) necessary to execute the agreed-upon certification maintenance policy and procedure.

In this sequence of events, it behooves the PMO to ensure that the options it puts in front of the PP/WG are those that it can successfully support and implement. Thus, it is critical that the PMO fully understands the range of constraints (e.g., resources, infrastructure) it may have in order to craft and shape certification maintenance options that optimally address program stakeholders' needs/wants and PMO constraints.

Critical Considerations

The table below lists critical considerations that can assist the PMO facilitate and/or shape program stakeholders' deliberations with respect to the three sets of questions outlined below.

Question		Critical Consideration
1	Should certification maintenance activities provide evidence of "maintaining competence" or "growth"?	The NCCA standards call for "continuing competence" as the goal of any certification maintenance policy and procedures. "Continuing competence" can be interpreted in one of two (or both) ways. First, a program's certification maintenance policies and procedures could focus on "maintaining competence" and ask individuals to demonstrate continued mastery of content covered by the certification – including CHANGES TO THE CONTENT (due to changes in policy, for example) that occurred during the maintenance interval. Second, the program can also ask individuals to demonstrate "growth" – gain mastery of additional content critical to the profession but are not addressed by the certification, and/or gain a higher level of proficiency in content that is addressed by the certification. The choice of approach depends on the certification's purpose (from the users' perspective). Within DoD, both approaches appear to be necessary to ensure that the Department has the capability it needs. As such, DoD certification programs may need to adopt both approaches.
1A	If "maintaining competence," is re-certification an acceptable option?	Re-certification calls for an individual to simply re-take (and successfully pass) the certification assessment. Adoption of this approach necessarily requires the program to have multiple (but parallel or "equal") versions of the assessment. Depending on the size of the target population, this could mean needing to develop a number of assessment versions. At times, this becomes problematic when the topic areas being addressed are sufficiently narrow that they could only support the development of a small number of items. Within DoD, program stakeholders have considered re-certification as a last resort for maintaining a certification.

Question		Critical Consideration
1B	What categories of maintenance activities will the program accept (Education, Experience, Exposure, Training, etc.)?	Deliberations regarding this question need to focus first on the relevant content (e.g., as specified in the program's JTA) that should be addressed as part of the program's certification maintenance policies and procedures. Next, program stakeholders should discuss how individuals could gain access to that content. Information surfaced through this step should provide program stakeholders ideas regarding potential categories of maintenance activities that the program can adopt as part of its certification maintenance policies and procedures. Next, program stakeholders should discuss the extent to which each of the identified categories of maintenance activities provides individuals an effective opportunity to learn the defined content. The discussion should result in the identification activities that effectively present individuals the opportunity not to only learn relevant content, but also demonstrate mastery of the learned content. Finally, program stakeholders should consider the ease with which PDUs (professional development units) could be assigned to a particular manifestation of a certification maintenance activity under consideration. Program stakeholders should have an agreed-upon understanding of how PDUs could be reliably assigned to a particular manifestation of a certification maintenance activity (e.g., "seat-time" for training activities, "credit-hour" for education, etc.).
2B	If "growth," does the individual need to enact separate and distinct activities to maintain each certification?	Again, this situation depends on whether or not the two certifications are addressing the same content at different levels of proficiency, or are addressing different but complementary sets of content. However, program stakeholders need to define policy and procedures that make sense and are practical. If addressing the same content at different levels of proficiency, the same activities may be used to maintain both certifications (as long as there is justification for doing so). However, if the two certifications are addressing different but complementary sets of content, the program may choose to divide the total number of required PDUs to account for maintenance requirements associated with each certification (instead of requiring twice as many PDUs).
3	What time interval is ideal for the maintenance cycle?	Program stakeholders could choose to adopt any time interval for the maintenance cycle as long as the choice is justifiable (based on evidence regarding pace of change associated with the certification's content, for example). Within DoD, the practice has been to set the time interval at 2 years. However, the appropriateness of this time interval may differ from one area to another.
3A	When does the maintenance clock start?	The maintenance clock should start as soon as a certification is conferred. However, the PMO needs to ensure that it has the infrastructure and resources necessary to support this situation. If not, then the PMO and program stakeholders need to come up with an implementable solution that is linked to the certification conferral schedule.

Question	Critical Consideration
3B	How will the program handle the maintenance clock for individuals with multiple certifications?	The answer to this question is contingent on whether or not a program: (1) allows attainment of a certification (that is part of the program) as a way to maintain another certification, and (2) requires separate and distinct certification maintenance activities for each certification they hold. Again, the PMO needs to ensure that it has the infrastructure and resources necessary to support existence of multiple maintenance clocks for an individual, or the need to "refresh" an individual's maintenance clock upon conferral of a second certification, for example. Within DoD a practice has been to link the start and end of the maintenance clock to the conferral date of the first certification the individual attains.